

Message Text

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FOR HIRSCH

FOL REPEAT TEL AVIV 3480 ACTION SECSTATE INFO AMMAN CAIRO
DAMASCUS JERUSALEM DTD 17 MAY.

QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IS

SUBJECT: POLLING BEGINS; AN ELECTION FORECAST

BEGIN SUMMARY: AS VOTING GETS UNDERWAY TODAY, THE OUT-
LOOK STILL REMAINS UNCERTAIN. LIKE OTHERS, WE FORESEE
A SLIM ALIGNMENT LEAD OVER THE LIKUD, BUT THE LARGE
UNDECIDED VOTE THAT APPEARED IN MOST RECENT POLLS MAKES
ANY PREDICTION RISKY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE KNESSET CAMPAIGN CLOSED YESTERDAY WITH A FINAL
FLURRY OF PARTY ACTIVITY. AS VOTERS GO TO THE POLLS
TODAY (SOME 80 PERCENT PARTICIPATION OF THE 2.2 MILLION
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ELIGIBLE VOTERS IS EXPECTED) THE COUNTRY IS ON A
SEMI-HOLIDAY BASIS. THE MAJOR PARTIES HAVE MOBILIZED
THEIR VOLUNTEERS TO GET OUT THE VOTE AND THE EGGED BUS
COMPANY IS PROVIDING FREE TRANSPORTATION. THE 3380
POLLING PLACES, WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS, WILL BE OPEN
FROM 7 A.M. TO 11 P.M.

2. THE PARTIES WENT ALL OUT IN CAMPAIGNING ON THE FINAL WEEKEND. ADDRESSING A HUGE GATHERING IN LOD, HOME OF ISRAEL AIRCRAFT INDUSTRIES, PERES RAN INTO A BARRAGE OF LIKUD HECKLING. HE DEFTLY TURNED ASIDE THEIR INTERRUPTIONS WITH WISECRACK RETORTS OF HIS OWN. BEGIN SPOKE BEFORE MASS RALLIES IN JERUSALEM AND TEL AVIV, DEMONSTRATING HIS OLD FORM, APPARENTLY NONE THE WORSE FOR HIS RECENT HEART ATTACK.

3. ALTHOUGH ELECTIONEERING CONTINUED ON MAY 16, THE ANTICIPATED CLIMAX CAME SUNDAY NIGHT (MAY 15) WITH THE LONG AWAITED PERES-BEGIN TV DEBATE--THE FIRST EVER BETWEEN ASPIRANTS FOR THE PREMIER-SHIP. BOTH WERE IN GOOD FORM, BOTH REHASHED WELL-KNOWN POSITIONS, BUT NEITHER DEMONSTRATED FLASHES OF BRILLIANCE--NOR DID EITHER COMMIT ANY GAFFES. BEGIN NEEDLED PERES BY QUOTING FROM HIS OLD STATEMENTS TO SHOW THAT PERES' POSITION DIFFERED LITTLE FROM THE LIKUD'S. PERES REMAINED UNRUFFLED. THE DEBATE WAS SEEN AS PRETTY MUCH OF A DRAW AND PROBABLY HAD MINIMAL EFFECT ON PERSUADING VOTERS. AS ONE COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT PUT IT, ELECTION DEBATES CAN SOMETIMES HELP UNKNOWN CANDIDATES, BUT SUNDAY'S PERFORMERS HARDLY FELL INTO THAT CATEGORY. THE FACT THAT PERES AGREED TO DEBATE WAS SOMETHING OF A VICTORY FOR BEGIN SINCE IT TENDED TO LEGITIMIZE THE LIKUD'S CLAIM TO BE A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALIGNMENT. BEN GURION, FOR EXAMPLE, HAD NEVER DEIGNED TO ENTER PUBLIC DEBATE WITH BEGIN OR ANY OTHER RIVAL.

4. AS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, THE CAMPAIGN WAS NOTABLE FOR THE ABSENCE OF SERIOUS DISCUSSION OF ISSUES. WHILE IT DID TAKE ON SOME EXCITEMENT TOWARD THE END WITH A FEW LARGE RALLIES AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF CAMPAIGN EFFORTS, IT WAS GENERALLY A DULL AFFAIR. PERHAPS THE BIGGEST FACTOR IN INFLUENCING THE ELECTORATE'S THINKING IN THE FINAL DAYS WAS LESS THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF THAN PERCEIVED TRENDS IN WASHINGTON'S THINKING ON MIDDLE EAST ISSUES.

5. ANY ATTEMPT TO ESTIMATE THE OUTCOME IS HAMPERED BY THE LARGE UNDECIDED SEGMENT OF VOTERS REFLECTED IN MOST POLLS. IF A PARTICULAR TREND AWAY FROM OR TOWARD THE ALIGNMENT DEVELOPS

WITHIN THIS SEGMENT, THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM AMONG SEASONED OBSERVERS, WHICH GIVES THE ALIGNMENT A NARROW VICTORY, COULD BE WRONG. DEPENDING ON THE TREND'S DIRECTION, THE ALIGNMENT COULD COME IN SECOND OR, ON THE OTHER HAND, DO SURPRISINGLY WELL. HOWEVER, THE GENERAL EXPECTATION REMAINS THAT THE ALIGNMENT WILL SUFFER SOME EROSION AND THAT MOST OF THIS LOST GROUND WILL BE ABSORBED BY THE DMC, WHICH WILL ALSO PICK UP VOTES THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY GONE TO THE ILP AND SHULAMIT ALONI. THE DMC WILL ALSO GET A SMALL PART OF THE LIKUD VOTE--AT LEAST THAT PORTION OF THE LIKUD VOTERS WHO HAD SUPPORTED THE FREE CENTER IN THE 1973 ELECTION WHEN IT WAS PART OF THE LIKUD.

6. WE AGREE WITH THIS ESTIMATE AND THE BELIEF
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THAT THE TYPICAL VOTER OF ALIGNMENT BACKGROUND WHO MAY STILL BE UNDECIDED WILL AT THE MOMENT OF TRUTH STICK WITH HIS PARTY. BASED ON THIS, OUR GUESS IS THE ALIGNMENT TOTAL WILL BE IN THE LOW FORTIES; THE LIKUD WILL ABOUT HOLD ITS OWN (MINUS THE TWO FREE CENTER SEATS); DMC--12 TO 15; NRP--9 OR 10; AGUDAH PARTIES--5; SHELLI--THREE OR FOUR; ILP--ONE OR TWO; UNITED ARAB LIST--ONE OR TWO; RAKAH--SIX OR SEVEN; AND ANY ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING MAY PICK UP A SEAT: CITIZENS RIGHTS, SHLOMZION, BEN-PORAT AND FLATTO-SHARON.

7. THUS, ALTHOUGH WE THINK THE ALIGNMENT WILL WIN A SMALL PLURALITY, IT WOULD HARDLY BE ABLE TO TAKE MUCH SATISFACTION IN SUCH A "VICTORY." AT BEST IT WOULD FACE A DIFFICULT TIME OF HARD BARGAINING TO PUT TOGETHER A COALITION UNDER ITS CONTROL. WITH A MARGIN OF FIVE TO SEVEN SEATS IT COULD WELL FACE THE CHOICE OF SHARING POWER WITH THE LIKUD OR GOING INTO OPPOSITION.
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UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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Disposition Case Number: n/a
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